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AUTHOR	Pahl, Kate
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ABSTRACT

This paper considers how children's text making is shaped by the environment in which the texts are made. By considering texts made in classrooms and texts made in homes, the paper explores how classrooms and homes interact with children's (6-7 year old boys) reflective processes as they create artifacts--drawings, models, and writings. The paper draws on research from a longitudinal ethnographic study on children's meaning making in homes and communities. It states that three families were selected for the study, and the children were visited fortnightly, where data were collected in the form of photographs and texts, and some interaction was taped; in addition, visits were made to the children's classrooms to acquire background information on text making in schools. The paper concentrates on what it calls "ephemera, mess, and miscellaneous piles" that is the backdrop to the creation of texts within homes. It looks at how homes shape texts, how children make texts within a context, and at the interaction between reflection and transformation, between a child's making of the text and the stuff from which a text is made. To analyze the texts, the paper draws on the work of P. Bourdieu and work from social semiotics by G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen, and also draws on work by linguists who acknowledge that children's text making is very visual. It also draws on the concept of "syncretic" literacy practices, to describe when children use a diverse cultural mix when making texts in the home. The paper contrasts this with a discussion about classrooms and considers what the making of texts in homes can communicate about practices in classrooms. (Contains 2 figures and 14 references.) (NKA)

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Texts in homes and communities
Kate Pahl, King's College, London

This paper invites us to consider how children's text making is shaped by the environments in which the texts are made. By considering texts made in classrooms and texts made in homes, the paper will explore how classrooms and homes interact with children's reflective processes as they create artifacts. The texts in question are drawings, models and writing by 6 –7 year old boys. The paper draws on research from a longitudinal ethnographic study on children's meaning making in homes and communities. Three families were selected to be in the study, and the children were visited fortnightly, where data was collected in the form of photographs, texts provided at the time, and some interaction was taped. In addition, visits were made to the children's classrooms in order to acquire background information on text making in schools.

In this paper I am going to concentrate on what I am going to call ephemera, mess and miscellaneous piles, that is the backdrop to the creation of texts within homes. I am going to look at how homes shape texts, and how children make texts within a context. I am going to look at the interaction between reflection and transformation, between a child's making of the text and the stuff from which a text is made. Homes create a space for children to reflect upon and create texts in a way that is very different from classrooms. I would like to stress that the homes in question are not affluent homes, or middle class homes, and the spaces available to children may not be what you expect. One of the joys of ethnography is discovering the unexpected, or 'making the familiar strange'. This is the process I observe in this study.

I am going to contrast this with a discussion about classrooms and consider what the making of texts in homes can tell us about practices in classrooms. However, I am not going to foreground the classroom, as it is a much more visible arena, and there is a familiarity with the routines of 'tidy up time', literacy hour and so on. It is the under researched and under theorized making space of the home that I am interested in.

With some of the examples of data, I am going to take an image, together with a piece of talk extracted from interviews with the children's mothers. The talk is then situated within the visual. Many of the mothers' interviews also refer to visual phenomena. These interviews came at the end of the study.

When families live their lives within homes a process occurs, which differs between households and between families, but which is nevertheless observable, which is the production of texts within homes. This process goes on at the same time as adults try to live their lives within homes, tidy them up, sometimes decorate them and generally make a space where children can also live their lives.

Children make texts, whether they are marks, scribbles, patterns made with a necklace, small displays of objects, whether ephemeral and forgotten, or kept and stored in some special place. Some of these texts could be collected as *artifacts* which are sometimes valued; other texts remain hidden, thrown away and discarded.

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Some of these texts if they can be observed over time can be seen as *practices*, being activities observable and practiced over time. (Street 1993, Barton and Hamilton 1998) Some texts can be observed in the home as *events*, as they unfold in front of the researcher. Some *events* solidify into *texts* which, if observed over time, sediment into *practices*.

Practices are built up within homes, and when the researcher visits, can be recorded as regular and iterative. Texts vary in time and status. One of my intentions here is to pay attention to every moment of meaning making, however ephemeral. I call every moment of meaning making, however brief, a 'text', even if it marks a brief 'punctuation' or 'mark' in the passing process of semiosis. (Kress 2000, in conversation) These 'punctuations' in the process of semiosis can be liked to small moment by moment disruptions in a general pattern of daily life as it is lived. The home then becomes an environment which structures and responds to this constant process of semiosis.

Within this process there are some points where an activity either is something, or it is not. This is one way of describing text making in the home. It is either reflective of stability, or change. An activity could be regular, observable, iterative. It could correspond to the regular, generative building up of practices which can be described as *habitus*. This is a word used by Bourdieu to apply to habitual events observed over time. I am interested in the relationship between texts production by children, and the way life is lived within the home, the habitus. (Bourdieu 1977)

In this paper some examples of ephemeral and habitual text making by 6- 7 year olds in the home will be considered. The texts will be framed by the words caught on tape in extended interviews with the children's mothers. Because the texts were seen as possible causes of mess or disruption to the household, the evidence for their existence is also less powerful, although in each case an example of a text has been captured, either on film or on paper.

To analyze the texts, I draw on both the work of Bourdieu and work from social semiotics by Kress and van Leeuwen. I also draw on work by linguists who acknowledge that children's text making is very visual. In particular, the work of Duranti and Ochs, who acknowledge that,

> 'the researcher cannot count on language as a privileged key to how cultures interface in the literacy activities of a person or of a community,' (Duranti and Ochs 1996 p. 2).

I also draw on their concept of 'syncretic' literacy practices, to describe when children use a diverse cultural mix when making texts in the home. Duranti and Ochs stress,

'the need to study the daily moment-by-moment confluence of multiple cultural models'

This emphasis on the moment by moment arrangement of space within the home as yielding clues to how children interact with texts is similar to the approach here, and gives support to the concentration upon space and the arrangement of space in the home.

Children's texts as mess

I am going to illustrate my points with illuminating examples from the ethnographic work I have been doing. I take this data from a particular point in my thesis. I had been visiting the three homes for over a year, and felt it was time to interview the mothers of the children I was visiting, in depth about their meaning making. These interviews were enormously productive, and gave me a lot of reflective data. They also provided a backdrop to how I conceptualized children's meaning making in the home

The first example is from the home of Stella, who is a teacher, and the mother of Sol, who is seven. Her home is an active transformative space where her son makes meaning. Sol, her son, was interested in making small objects out of 'Femo' a type of modeling material which hardens in the oven. He habitually displayed these around the house. The house is a low level one story council house on a small estate. It is decorated in bright pastel colours, and contains within it a television, which is never on, many photographs of Sol, a large number of resources including a computer, a play station, pens paper modeling material and also materials for Stella to construct lessons from. Sol's drawings and models are often observable to the visiting researcher.

The interview with Stella centered upon her need to have her house tidy despite Sol's interest in making and creating small object displays:

Stella: *And because Sol is just a bit person,*
his life is these little miniature figures,
and they're just, and he is interesting ,
because he had to <u>leave</u> things,
and I realize that today that I'm quite ferocious in my nagging now,
and I said to him this morning I said,
you cleared up and I said
next minute there's a few coins there's a crystal you've left on the floor
and I said
don't get it....
But actually part of me thinks that it may be this desire for him to kind of
not completely clear something away,
And he has to leave something,
because it's a meaning of ongoing a serial

Stella's interview centered around her ambivalence about her son's ephemeral text making in the home. She both values it, and explicitly says this at various points in the interview, and finds it a problem, as here. She describes Sol's home texts in terms of 'these little miniature figures' which he has to 'leave', while she describes herself as 'ferocious' in her nagging. This combination of both permissive and 'ferocious' which is

here expressed almost simultaneously, is a common paradox in many homes. The paradox becomes the habitus, the sense of tension between things being left and things being cleared up, between mess and tidiness. In Stella's house, the child's objects are displayed on the mantelpiece, but in a provisional fashion. Here is Stella talking about her mantelpiece (see Figure 1):

Stella: *So what I'm trying to do is*
for example I was thinking
I want plants on the mantelpiece
because again it gets very cluttered,
but what I thought is
if I have a couple of plants
like I did at Christmas
they look very nice as you walk past
but then that's fine, three things
and I thought then I'd be quite happy for him in between to have his little displays
so I think there's a part of me now
that's thinking more about how its possible for him to still leave parts of himself
because that's what its about'

Stella says that she wants plants on the mantelpiece because it 'gets very cluttered', but acknowledges the importance of Sol having his 'little displays' which she acknowledges to be 'parts of himself' and she acknowledges Sol's subjectivity within the display making. The 'mess' is reconstituted by the mother as being 'part of himself', and she resists destroying the child's display. Parents acknowledge that children's texts lie on the cusp of 'mess and 'tidiness'. They exist in a contested space and find it difficult to say clearly whether they are clutter or valued artifacts.

Children's texts as ephemeral

Many of the texts I observed being made in the home had a necessarily short life as they were hastily constituted, often out of bits of food, old tissues or anything 'to hand' (Kress 1997). One such example of ephemera is Fatih's bead map.

(See figure 2)

Fatih was a Turkish boy who when I met him was five. He is now six, about to turn seven. His mother, Elif had married young – aged 14 and she had traveled to Britain at that age when she was married. She then had two sons, Hanif, 9 and Fatih, 6. She endured domestic violence, and spent a year in a women's refuge. Fatih aged five was quite upset, and showed signs of being quite disturbed. However, in the family literacy class I taught he drew wonderful pictures which is how I first got interested in him. I am going to describe two episodes in Fatih's meaning making which were recorded while Fatih was attending school, and I was regularly visiting his classroom, and his home simultaneously. Soon after that, Fatih no longer was able to attend the classroom, to the

great sorrow of his very gifted class teacher and myself. His behavior deteriorated and he is now receiving one to one lessons for a short part of the day.

Fatih was then in a year 2 classroom which also contains children from year 1. Overlooking a busy road, it was a typical Victorian North London two form entry school. The classroom I visited was an exceptionally supportive and caring one, and Fatih's teachers and helper worked hard to enable him to make meaning in the classroom. While having some emotional problems at the time I was visiting, he was able to create and sometimes to model his creating to other children. He made an exceptional map, which I talked about on Thursday, of his flat. This interview comes some time after the map making episode, and forms part of a longer discussion with Elif about Fatih and his meaning making at home. Some parts of the interview also were conducted in Turkish, with Elif writing down her responses for translation.

After the map making episode, I was interested in whether there were any other examples of map making to be found in the home, and also whether these originated from home and school. Here is a transcript of the discussion I had with Elif.

Kate: *Are there other things he makes? School and home birds, he made, didn't he? Any other things?*
Elif: *um... flag at home*
K: *Flag at home*
K: *that was not school though.*
E: *No*
K: *So flag and Pokemon is home. Birds at school and home. Any other things you remember?*
E: *Er... can't remember...*
K: *Map, maps at school though, didn't he?*
E: *No*
K: *Yeah but he also learned to do maps at school*
E: (ask Fatih in Turkish) *No, he said home. Do you know sometimes he just er, for mine I explain*
K: *Show me*
(She gets some prayer beads and makes a shape.)
E: (4) *Lots of these making these*
K: *Fatih makes*
E: *No*
K: *You make*
E: *No playing this*
K: *Beads*
E: *After prayer he making. He make it like this on the carpet*
K: *Yeah*
E: *like any which country.*
K: *A shape*
E: *Which country.*
K: *Ah I like that!*

E: *I said Ireland he make it different like how Turkey this. I said Turkey like this I said Turkey different very different I said England, Arabia* (laughs)

Here Elif is being steered by me into discussing home and school map making. However, she disrupts the questioning to describe a practice I had not envisaged, map making using prayer beads. Using the 'representational resources' available to him Fatih made briefly a temporary text. Elif describes the practices as an event 'after prayer' and connects it up with the practice of prayer. Elif prays five times a day according to the Islamic calendar. The cultural practices of praying with beads is then blended with a new practice – map making with beads. Like the Samoan families in Duranti and Ochs' study, this family is blending and mixing different cultural practices, often with the same cultural tools,

> 'Placed in a new context, old tools not only bring in remnants of the past but also force participants to face issues of tradition, change and social identity.'
> (Duranti and Ochs 1996)

Elif also construes Fatih's map making as 'play', as well as 'making'. Children's text making at home is often subsumed under the heading 'play', particularly if it has an ephemeral quality. This also accords the practice lower status. It is notable that the recent emphasis on observable literacy practices does not allow for the invisible literacy practices of young children and adults, often because these practices are cleared up before a researcher enters the home. Homes and classrooms alike place emphasis on display rather than process, and process is seen in both sites as ephemeral. The map beads are a momentary text – if they had not been photographed they would not have been recorded. They are an example of ephemera in the home. From one powerful iterative event, to another occasional ephemeral event, the moment by moment change is charted only by accident in conversation with Fatih's mother and then recorded with the camera.

Miscellaneous piles

Finally, I want to discuss the miscellaneous pile in relation to children's text making, and begin to construct a theory of the home as a miscellaneous pile in which children's text making appears arbitrary but is often constructed in relation to that pile. In a different way I want to describe how parent's attitudes to tidiness both shape and are shaped by children's meaning making at home. I must stress I am not saying that parents should allow chaos, nor am I questioning the tidy or untidy house. I am simply seeing it as part of the equation when talking about children's text making at home.

The term 'miscellaneous pile' comes from Stella, one of the interviewees and parent of Sol, who we met in the beginning making models on the mantelpiece. Stella here is bemoaning her inability to keep things tidy,

Stella: *What it is its not even...*
'cos I go into people's home
s and they are incredibly jam packed,
But there's this sense of still order...

whereas I feel what happens to me is that I end up having miscellaneous piles...

This sense of her household containing unsorted material coming from a variety of different sources permeates much of what Stella articulates about her struggle to keep her home tidy. However, when visiting each home, I realize that each home constructs itself differently, and often the apparent image of the 'miscellaneous pile' can be unpacked and become comprehensible, as can the ordered household be disrupted by miscellaneous activity.

Ephemera as Text

It is this precisely, 'history forgotten', habitus, which I think is worth salvaging from the homes of young children. Often the key research question is, what counts as ephemera, not important and how is it constituted? When does something get thrown away, forgotten? When does the ephemera of the habitus, bits and pieces from children's play, solidify into text as artifact?

As homes construct ephemera and save objects for display, the moment by moment decisions about what is important, taken by children and adults within that home, fall along different lines. While Elif's household took the beads and then classed the bead map as 'play' while placing it within a strongly classified socio-cultural space, that of 'prayer', Stella places upon herself the burden of Sol's creativity to balance in decisions about what is ephemeral or not.

All households sort their stuff differently, and all children construct their texts differently. By paying attention to what is on the margins of the households, sometimes insights can be gained as to unspoken decisions about the classification of things, of matter and of mess. This gives us important information about the context in which children reflect upon and shape their texts within homes.

Text production in classrooms

What I have outlined is a very particular set of ideas about how homes construct mess and tidiness, how they struggle with that, and how children's texts are constructed within that. I am not going to present examples of children's work in classrooms, but I am going to leave you with a piece of interview transcript, again from Stella talking about her experience of classrooms

Stella is actually thinking aloud about the way her home supports Sol's meaning making, but along the way she makes a point about children's meaning making in classrooms:

Stella:	*that .. the biggest frustration I had when I was a teacher,*
	was children would make the most amazing things
K:	*um*
S:	*usually in their choosing time and,*

often it was like you have to stop now/

K: */tidy up*

S: */and they'd either finished it and they didn't want to break up the model*
or they were so close to finishing it
and that was that frustration
so I always used to find that very frustrating
that you'd create this space

K: *mm*

S: *but then unless it was a changing space*
it just became something that they'd dump things on
that they were pleased with
but nothing happened as a follow up
so for example you wouldn't then say
even if you did, because of being young children
this idea of if something is unfinished you can go back to it

K: *Yeah*

S: *young children find that very difficult*

K: *Its very problematic/*

S */and its only as they get older*
there's this idea here's the unfinished piece
we'll go back and carry on with it
so often you'd find it was this wonderful thing
they were totally engrossed in and so you'd say next week:
'Do you want to finish it?'
'No'
So but to me,
what I've realized now is that
because I've kind of cleared out most of the clutter in here/

K: */Yeah its very tidy*

S: */I actually now feel*
there is actually potential for space for Sol/

In this conference the theme is reflection, 'just let me think' I want you to consider the value of the reflective space, the value of ephemera, of things imperfectly tidied away, the unfinished object, and the need children have sometimes to move beyond the boundaries arbitrarily imposed upon them by school timetables. Going back to Fatih's bead map, I was totally unprepared for this activity. Yet this was an absorbing, transformative, reflective activity, based upon the concept of 'map. It was caught by me, but often these transitory moments remain unexplored and un- researched. Today, I want to celebrate them.

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Fig1

Fig2

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